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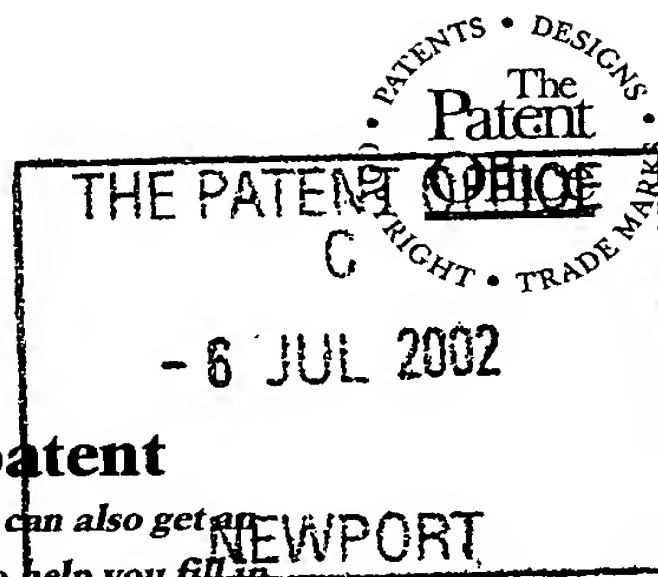


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Dated 23 July 2002



Patent (Rule 1b) 1977



1/77

Request for grant of a patent

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ASVAM/P11797GB

08JUL02 E731436-4 D00239
P01/7700 0.00 0215668.5

2. Patent application number

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0215668.5

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

WEATHERFORD/LAMB, INC.
515 POST OAK BOULEVARD
SUITE 600
HOUSTON
TX 77027
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

8028714001

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

DELAWARE CORPORATION

4. Title of the invention

COUPLING TUBULARS

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

CRUIKSHANK & FAIRWEATHER
19 ROYAL EXCHANGE SQUARE
GLASGOW
G1 3AE
SCOTLAND
UNITED KINGDOM

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

547002

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Country

Priority application number
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Number of earlier application

Date of filing
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YES

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Description 13

Claim(s) 8

Abstract

Drawing(s) 4 + 4 RM

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Priority documents

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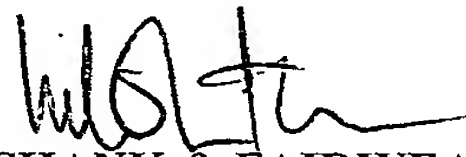
Request for preliminary examination and search (Patents Form 9/77) 1

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Any other documents (please specify)

11. I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature



Date

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5 JULY 2002

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

ANDREW SHANKS

0141 221 5767

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DUPLICATE

COUPLING TUBULARS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to coupling tubulars, and in particular to coupling expandable tubulars, most particularly expandable downhole tubulars.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 Downhole tubulars, such as bore-lining casing and liners, are typically coupled by means of threaded connectors, or by providing adjacent ends of tubulars with male and female, or pin and box, threaded ends. For conventional applications, such coupling arrangements are generally satisfactory, providing secure, pressure tight connections. However, where strings of tubulars are to be diametrically expanded, it has been found that the integrity of the coupling may be compromised.

10 It is among the objectives of embodiments of the present invention to provide coupling arrangements for tubulars which will retain mechanical and pressure integrity following diametric expansion of the tubulars.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first embodiment of the present

invention there is provided an expandable coupling arrangement for first and second expandable tubulars, the coupling comprising:

5 a male thread portion on an end of a first tubular;
and

a female thread portion on an end of a second tubular,
the thread portions comprising dovetail threads and
having flanks, roots and crests, wherein the flanks are
inclined at an angle of greater than 10° .

10 On expansion of the engaged thread portions, the high
angle dovetail threads maintain the integrity of the
coupling. The invention has particular application in
couplings which are to be subject to expansion by a rotary
expansion tool. Such a tool expands the male or pin thread
15 portion by reducing the wall thickness of the portion,
resulting in a corresponding increase in circumference and
diameter of the portion, which tends to be accompanied by
axial elongation of the thread portion. However, the
female or box thread portion is expanded by contact with
20 the expanding male or pin thread portion. This tends to
induce axial contraction of the female thread portion. In
a conventional thread, this differential expansion tends to
produce an adverse effect on the thread integrity, however
in the present invention the opposite is true; the
25 differential expansion tends to lock the thread portions
together.

Preferably, the thread portions define a thread which is cut in an opposite direction to the intended direction of rotary expansion of the coupling, such that any torque applied to the coupling by the rotating expander will tend to tighten the coupling.

Each thread portion has stab flanks and load flanks, and it is preferred that both the stab flanks and the load flanks of each respective thread portion are inclined at substantially the same angle to the respective thread root.

Preferably, the flanks are inclined at an angle of greater than 15° .

Preferably, the flanks of the male thread portion are inclined at an angle of less than 80° , and most preferably less than 75° , to the male thread portion roots.

Preferably, the flanks of the female thread portion are inclined at an angle of less than 80° , and most preferably less than 75° , to the female thread portion roots.

The thread portions may be parallel, tapered or stepped.

Preferably, the first tubular has a leading end portion or nose adapted to be radially constrained by the second tubular. For example, the second tubular may define an undercut slot, recess or groove in which the nose is received. This prevents the nose from separating from the second tubular, and in particular from encroaching into the

internal diameter of the coupling following expansion, as might otherwise occur due to "end effects", where the free end or nose tends to diametrically contract more than adjacent portions of the tubular. Alternatively, or in addition, the groove may extend axially and be dimensioned to accommodate axial extension of the first tubular relative to the second tubular. The groove may accommodate a deformable sealing material, such as an elastomer, in particular an elastomer o-ring or the like which will be energised by relative axial extension of the male thread. Preferably, the free end of the first tubular is not threaded, to permit axial movement of the nose relative to the second tubular, and thus to energise, or further energise, the deformable seal, where provided. Preferably, the groove features a rounded recess angle, to prevent stress concentration and to alleviate stress-induced cracking upon expansion.

Preferably, the first tubular comprises at least one sealing member for sealing engagement with an opposing surface of the second tubular, most preferably for sealing engagement with an opposing surface adjacent a free end of the second tubular. Conveniently, the sealing engagement is provided with a surface spaced sufficiently from the free end of the second tubular to accommodate axial shrinkage of the tubular following expansion. The end effect of the free end also serves to energise the sealing member. Most

preferably, the sealing member is in the form of an elastomer. At least two axially spaced elastomers may be provided. The sealing members may be located in appropriate grooves in the first tubular.

5 Where sealing members are provided, it is preferred that these are formed of swelling elastomers, or other materials which swell or expand when exposed to a selected fluid, most preferably the fluid or fluids contained by the sealing member. Thus, a seal will be re-energised in the
10 event of a leak. The use of adjacent sealing members which swell in response to contact with different fluids ensures re-energisation of a leaking seal in an environment where the seal may be exposed to a number of different fluids, for example a water-swell elastomer and an oil-swell elastomer
15 in adjacent grooves provides for re-energising a seal in a water and oil environment.

The material properties of the male and female threads may be selected to facilitate the creation of a secure engage between the threads following expansion.

20 Preferably, at least some of the crests of the threads are adapted to extend axially on expansion of the coupling. On expansion of the coupling, the root portions of the threads, particularly the root portions of the male thread portion, will tend to elongate to a greater extent than the
25 other, thicker portions of the threads. There is thus a possibility of a loss of contact between the flanks of the

engaged thread portions. To counter this possibility, the crests may be configured to splay outwardly on experiencing the radial compression associated with expansion of the coupling. In one embodiment this is achieved by providing a relief or slot in the crest. This effect may be enhanced by providing a rib or spreader on at least some of the roots.

The various features described above may be incorporated in other couplings, in addition to couplings made in accordance with the first embodiment of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

This and other aspects of the present invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a sectional drawing of a tubular coupling in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 2 is an enlarged view of area 2 of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a sectional drawing of a pin connector forming part of a coupling in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 4 is an enlarged view of area 4 of Figure 3;

Figure 5 is an enlarged view of area 5 of Figure 3;

Figure 6 is a sectional drawing of a box connector

forming part of a coupling in accordance with said further embodiment of the present invention, and configured to be coupled with the pin connector of Figure 3;

Figure 7 is an enlarged view of area 7 of Figure 6; and

5 Figure 8 is an enlarged view of area 8 of Figure 6; and

Figure 9 is an enlarged view of an area of part of a coupling in accordance with a still further embodiment of the present invention.

10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

Figures 1 and 2 of the drawings illustrate an upset threaded coupling 10 connecting the ends of first and second downhole tubulars 12, 14. The end of the first tubular 12 features a male threaded portion 16, or pin connection, while the adjacent end of the second tubular 14 features a corresponding female threaded portion 18, or box connection. The male and female threads 20, 22 are parallel, that is the roots and crests of the threads extend parallel to the longitudinal axis 24 of the coupled tubulars 12, 14, and as
15 may be seen more clearly from Figure 2, the threads 20, 22 are dovetailed. In particular, each thread has flanks 26, roots 28 and crests 30, and the flanks 26 are inclined at an angle 27 of greater than 15° to the roots 28 and the crests
20 30.

25 The leading end of the first tubular 12 has a nose 32

which, when the tubulars 12, 14 are coupled, is located in an axially-extending circumferential groove 34 at the base of the female threaded portion 18. The groove 34 accommodates an elastomeric O-ring 35. The free end of the second tubular 14 is similarly located in a corresponding groove 36 at the base of the male portion 16, which also accommodates an o-ring 38, and the free end of the second tubular 14 is also pinned to the male portion 16 to prevent relative rotation.

10 In use, the coupling 10 is made up on surface in the usual manner, that is the ends of the tubular will be brought together, the first tubular 12 then rotated relative to the second tubular 14 to make up the threads, and the made-up ends then pinned. In this manner a tubing string
15 will be created, and will be run into a bore. Once in position in the bore, a rotary expansion tool is run through the string, in direction "A", to diametrically expand the tubing. When the tool encounters a coupling 10, the male threaded portion 16 is subject to diametric expansion, by
20 virtue of the wall thickness of the portion being reduced, with a corresponding increase in circumference. The increasing outside diameter of the male portion 16 causes the surrounding female portion 18 to experience a corresponding increase in diameter. Furthermore, the
25 increase in diameter of the male portion 16 is accompanied by axial extension, whereas the increase in diameter of the

female portion 18 is accompanied by axial contraction.

Whereas in a conventional thread profile such deformation tends to have an adverse affect on the integrity of the coupling, in the coupling 10 the deformation of the high angle dovetail thread locks the male and female portions 16, 18 together, such that mechanical and hydraulic integrity is retained, and indeed enhanced. Furthermore, any tendency of the male portion 16 to axially extend relative to the female portion 18 is accommodated by the groove 34, and is not restrained at the free end of the first tubular due to the absence of inter-engaging threads. Thus, the differential axial expansion and contraction of the tubulars 12,14 is utilised to further energise the o-ring 35 in the groove 34. The groove 34 also prevents the nose of the first tubular 12 from encroaching on the internal diameter once the expansion tool has passed.

The male and female thread portions 16,18 may be formed of the same or different materials, and the material properties, such as the yield strength, may be selected to facilitate creation of a secure lock.

Reference is now made to Figures 3 to 8 of the drawings, which illustrate a pin connector 50 (Figures 3, 4 and 5), and a box connector 52 (Figures 6, 7 and 8), together forming a coupling in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention. Reference is made first to Figure 3, which is a sectional drawing of the pin

connector 50, which may be welded to the end of an appropriate expandable tubular, or which may be machined in the end of a tubular. From a maximum outer diameter portion 54, the pin 50 steps down in diameter first to a seal
5 portion 56 and then to the male threaded portion 58. The "quick-start" thread is left-handed and dovetailed, the details of the thread being more readily visible in Figure 4, which is an enlarged view of area 4 of Figure 3.

10 The thread features parallel roots 60 and crests 62, and both the stab and load flanks 64, 66 are angled at 75 degrees to roots 60. The free end or nose 68 of the pin 50 is rounded and defines a negative angle of 45 degrees.

15 The seal portion 56 is substantially cylindrical, but defines two circumferential grooves 70, 72, one of which is illustrated in greater detail in Figure 5. The grooves 70, 72 receive respective O-rings (not shown) of swelling elastomer: one o-ring swells in response to contact with water, while the other swells from contact with oil.

20 Reference is now made in particular to Figure 6, which illustrates the box connector 52. Like the pin 50, the box 52 may be machined into the end of a tubular, or may be formed separately and then welded to the end of a tubular. The box 52 has an upset portion 80 which contains the female thread portion 82. The left-handed dovetail thread (Figure
25 7) is spaced from the free end of the box 52 by a smooth-walled portion 84 for cooperating with the seal portion 56

of the pin 50 (Figure 3).

At the inner end of the thread 82 is a rounded undercut groove 86 (Figure 8) adapted to receive and retain the pin nose 68 when the threads are made up.

5 The coupling 50, 52 is used in a similar manner to the coupling 10, that is tubulars provided with the pin and box ends are made up on surface to form a string and then run into a bore. A rotary expansion tool is then run through the string, the tool being rotated clockwise as the tool is
10 advanced axially through the string. When the tool encounters a coupling 50, 52, travelling in direction "A", the tool will induce compressive yield in the pin 50, reducing the pin wall thickness and thus increasing the pin diameter. This increase in diameter forces the surrounding
15 portions of the box 52 to diametrically expand. The different natures of the expansion mechanisms of the pin 50 and box 52 are such that the expanded pin 50 tends to extend axially, while the expanded box 52 tends to contract. This
20 locks the threads 58, 82 together. However, where relative axial movement is permitted, that is between the pin seal portion 56 and the smooth bore box portion 84, the relative dimension of the portions and the locations of the seal
25 grooves 70, 72 are selected to ensure maintenance of the seal between the opposing surfaces. In addition, the end effects experienced by the free end of the box 52, which will cause the free end to tend to diametrically contract to

a greater degree following passage of the expansion tool, also serves to maintain a seal.

The pin nose 68 experiences a similar end effect, however the nose is prevented from contracting by the engagement between the nose 68 and the groove 86.

Once the rotary expansion tool has passed through the pin 50 and engages directly the wall of the box 52, the box 52 will experience a clockwise torque. As the pin 50 and box 52 define a left-handed thread, this applied torque will therefore tend to tighten the threads; it has been found that diametric expansion of threaded couplings made up to a specified torque may lead to loosening of the coupling, and if this should occur the use of a thread direction which is opposed to the direction of rotation of the expander will serve to mitigate this effect.

Reference is now made to Figure 9 of the drawings, which illustrates details of a coupling in accordance with a still further embodiment of the invention. On expansion of the coupling by means of a rotary expander, the male thread 120 axially extends in addition to the desired diametric expansion. Furthermore, the relatively thin-walled portions of the thread 120, that is the root portions 128, tend to experience a greater degree of extension.

This introduces a risk that there will be a loss of contact between the male and female thread flanks 126. To avoid this possibility, the thread crests 130 feature a

relief 131, and the roots 128 feature a raised rib 129. Thus, when the coupling is expanded, and the male thread 120 is radially thinned and urged outwardly to expand the surrounding female thread 122, each crest 130 is urged into
5 the opposing root 128, the relief 131 and the rib 129 co-operating to splay the crest 130. The axial extent of the crest 130 therefore increases, as does the flank angle, such that the thread flanks 126 are maintained in engagement.

Those of skill in the art will appreciate that the
10 above described embodiments are merely exemplary of the present invention and that various modifications and improvements may be made thereto, without departing from the scope of the present invention.

CLAIMS

1. A diametrically expandable coupling arrangement for coupling diametrically expandable first and second tubulars, the coupling arrangement comprising:

5 a male thread portion on an end portion of a first tubular; and

a female thread portion on an end portion of a second tubular,

10 the thread portions comprising dovetail threads having flanks inclined at an angle of greater than 10° .

2. The coupling arrangement of claim 1, wherein the coupling arrangement is adapted for expansion by a rotary expansion tool.

15 3. The coupling of claim 2, wherein the thread portions define a thread cut in an opposite direction to the intended direction of rotation of the rotary expansion tool.

20 4. The coupling of claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein each thread portion has stab flanks and load flanks, and both the stab flanks and the load flanks of each respective thread portion are inclined at substantially the same angle.

5. The coupling of claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the flanks are inclined at an angle of greater than 15° .

6. The coupling of any of the preceding claims, wherein the flanks of the male thread portion are inclined at an angle of less than 80° to the male thread portion roots.

7. The coupling of any of the preceding claims, wherein the flanks of the male thread portion are inclined at an angle of less than 75° to the male thread portion roots.

8. The coupling of any of the preceding claims, wherein the flanks of the female thread portion are inclined at an angle of less than 80° to the female thread portion roots.

9. The coupling of any of the preceding claims, wherein the flanks of the female thread portion are inclined at an angle of less than 75° to the female thread portion roots.

10. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the thread portions are parallel.

11. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 1 to 9, wherein the thread portions are tapered.

12. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 1 to 9,

wherein the thread portions are stepped.

13. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the first tubular has a leading end portion adapted to be radially constrained by the second tubular.

5 14. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the second tubular defines an undercut groove adapted to receive the leading end portion of the first tubular.

10 15. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the second tubular defines a groove adapted to receive the leading end of the first tubular, the groove extending axially and being dimensioned to accommodate relative axial extension of the first tubular.

15 16. The coupling arrangement of claim 15, wherein the groove accommodates a deformable seal.

17. The coupling arrangement of claim 16, wherein the deformable seal is of an elastomer, adapted to be energised by relative axial extension of the first tubular.

20 18. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 14 to 17, wherein the groove features a rounded recess angle.

19. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the first tubular comprises at least one sealing member for sealing engagement with an opposing surface of the second tubular.

5 20. The coupling arrangement of claim 19, wherein the at least one sealing member is arranged and located for sealing engagement with an opposing surface adjacent a free end of the second tubular.

10 21. The coupling arrangement of claim 20, wherein the at least one sealing member is arranged and located for sealing engagement with a surface spaced sufficiently from the free end of the second tubular to accommodate axial shrinkage of the tubular following expansion.

15 22. The coupling arrangement of claim 20 or 21, wherein the at least one sealing member is arranged and located such that the end effect of the free end of the second tubular following expansion serves to energise the sealing member.

23. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 19 to 22, wherein the sealing member comprises an elastomer.

20 24. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 19 to 23, wherein at least two axially spaced sealing members are

provided.

25. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 19 to 24, wherein the at least one sealing member is located in a groove in the first tubular.

5 26. The coupling arrangement of any of claims 19 to 25, wherein the at least one sealing member comprises a material which swells when exposed to a selected material.

27. The coupling arrangement of claim 26, wherein the at least one sealing member comprises a swelling elastomer.

10 28. The coupling arrangement of claim 27, wherein two or more sealing members are provided and are adapted to swell in response to contact with different fluids.

29. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the free end of the first tubular arranged
15 to permit axial movement of the free end relative to the second tubular.

30. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the material properties of the male and female threads are selected to facilitate engagement of the
20 threads on the coupling being subject to rotary expansion.

31. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein the thread portions are metallic.

32. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein at least some of the crests of the threads
5 are adapted to extend axially on expansion of the coupling.

33. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding claims, wherein at least some of the crests of the threads comprise a relief.

34. The coupling arrangement of any of the preceding
10 claims, wherein at least some of the roots of the threads comprise a spreader.

35. The coupling arrangement of claim 34, wherein the spreader comprises a rib.

15 36. A tubular comprising a male thread portion on an end thereof, the thread portion comprising dovetail threads having flanks inclined at an angle of greater than 10° .

37. A tubular comprising a female thread portion on an end thereof, the thread portion comprising dovetail threads
20 having flanks inclined at an angle of greater than 10° .

38. A tubular string comprising first and second tubulars and comprising:

a male thread portion on an end portion of the first tubular; and

5 a female thread portion on an end portion of the second tubular,

the thread portions comprising dovetail threads having flanks inclined at an angle of greater than 10° .

39. A coupling arrangement for first and second tubulars comprising:

10 a male thread portion on an end portion of a first tubular; and

a female thread portion on an end portion of a second tubular,

15 wherein a free end of the first tubular is not threaded, to permit axial movement of the free end relative to the second tubular.

40. A method of expanding a threaded coupling comprising:

20 providing a coupling having a thread cut in one direction; and

passing a rotary expansion tool through the coupling while rotating the tool in the other direction.

41. A diametrically expandable coupling arrangement for

coupling diametrically expandable first and second tubulars,
the coupling arrangement comprising:

a male thread portion on an end portion of a first
tubular; and

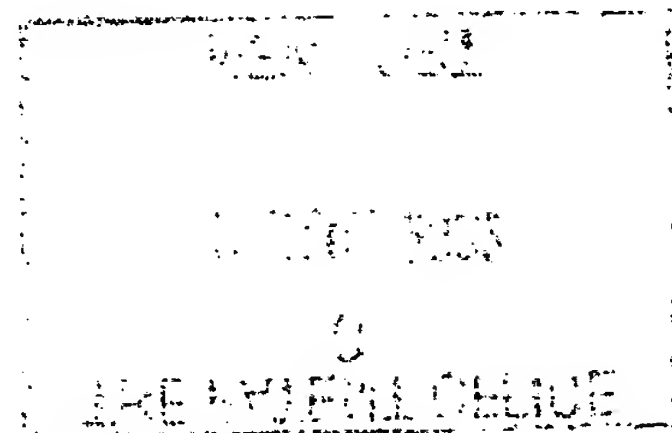
5 a female thread portion on an end portion of a second
tubular,

the thread portions comprising dovetail threads having
at least some crests adapted to extend axially on expansion
of the coupling.

10 42. The coupling arrangement of claim 41, wherein at least
some of the crests of the threads comprise a relief.

43. The coupling arrangement of claim 41 or 42 , wherein at
least some of the roots of the threads comprise a spreader.

15 44. The coupling arrangement of claim 43, wherein the
spreader comprises a rib.



1/4.

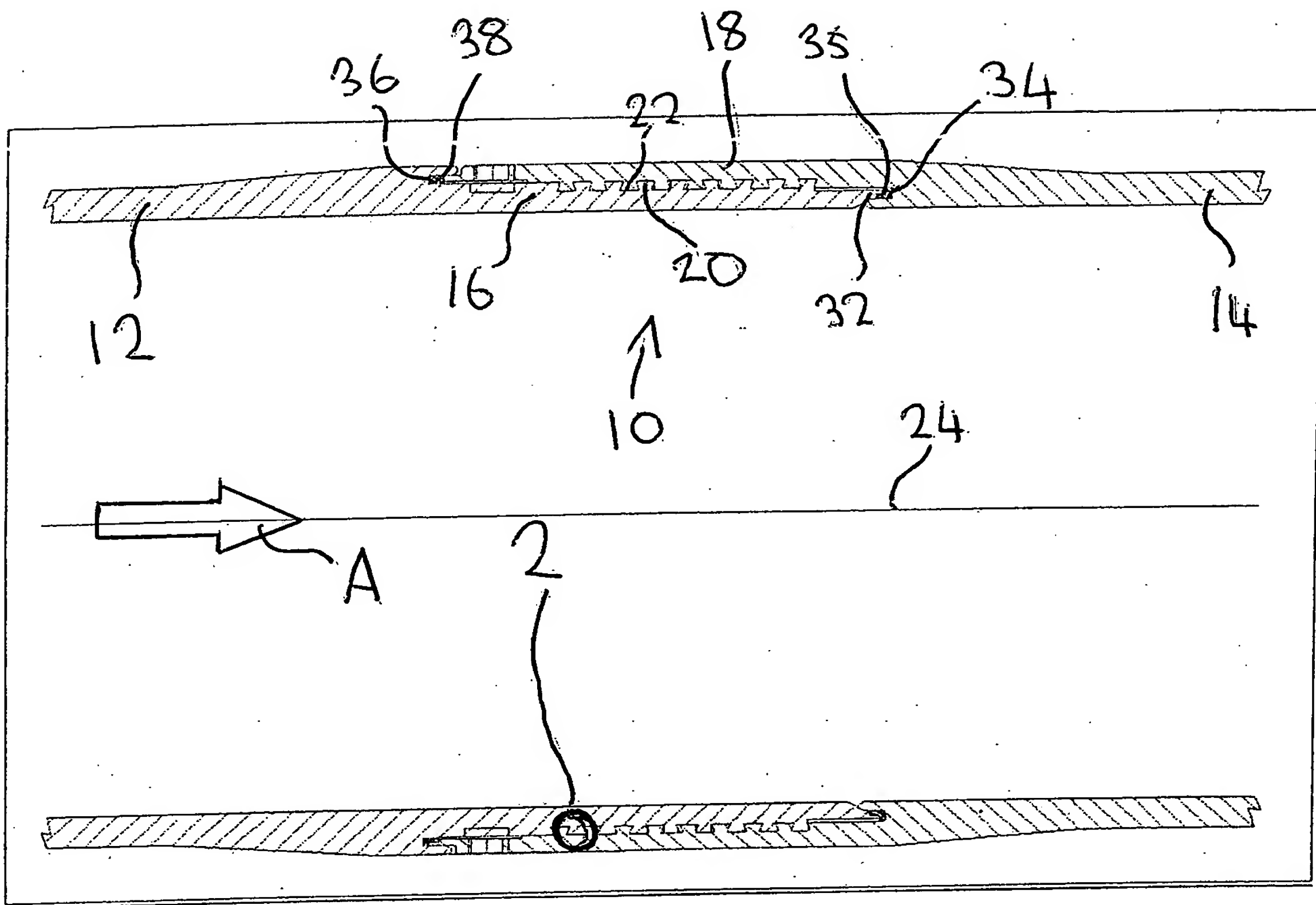


FIGURE 1

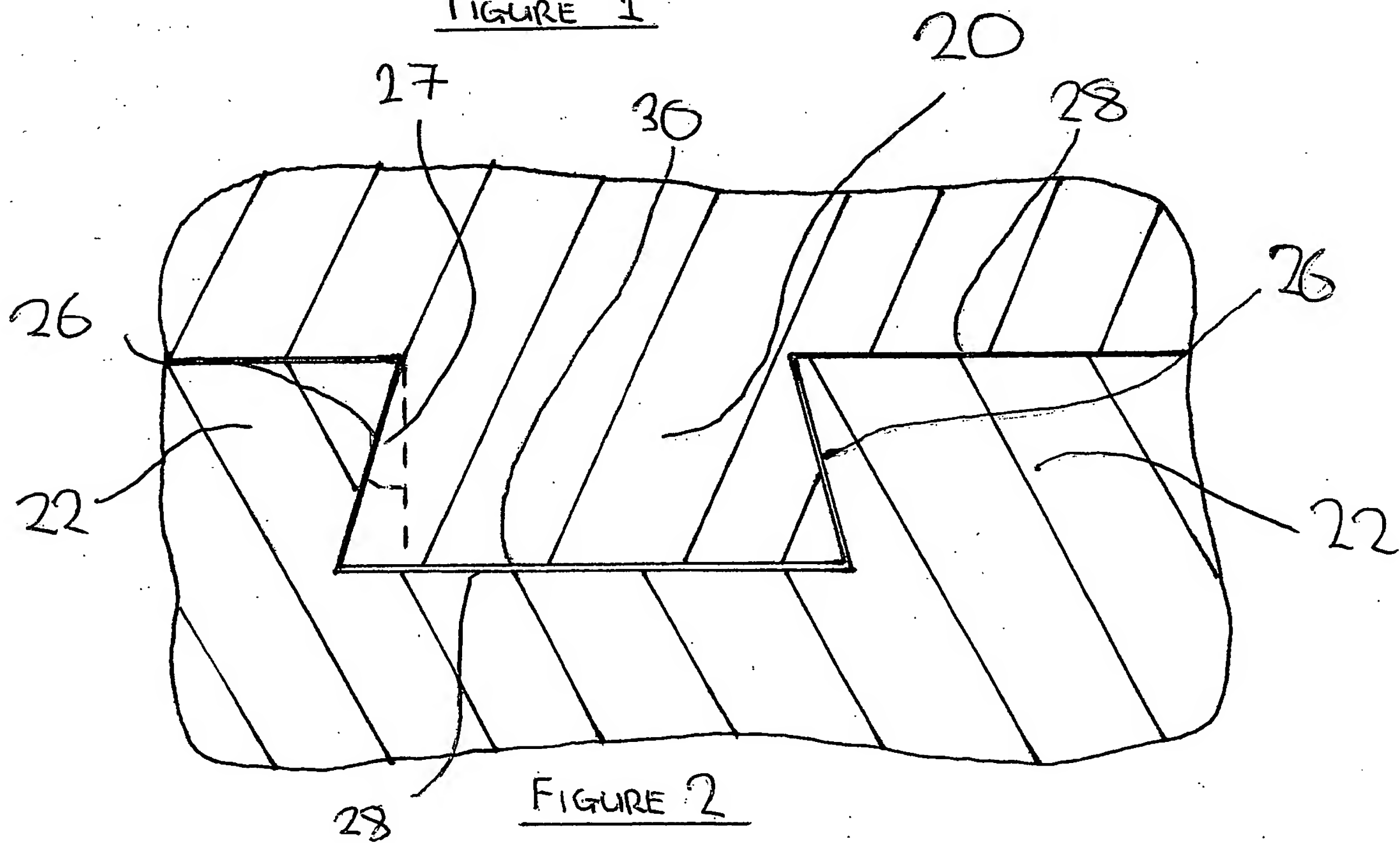


FIGURE 2

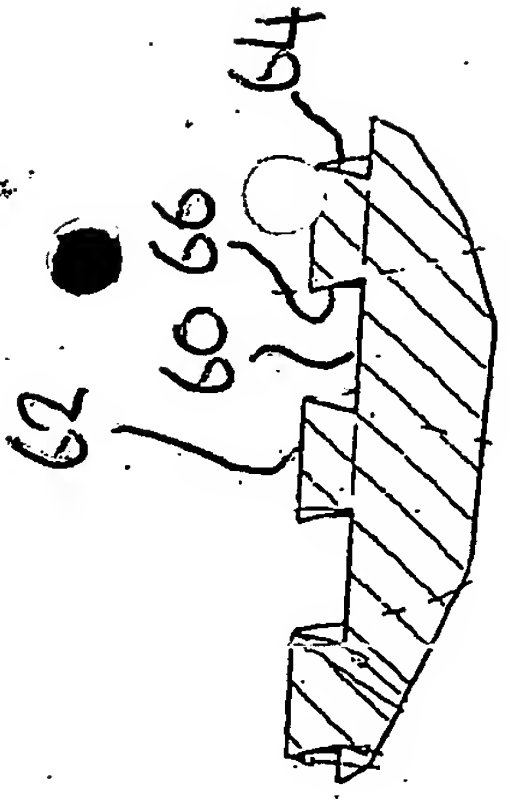
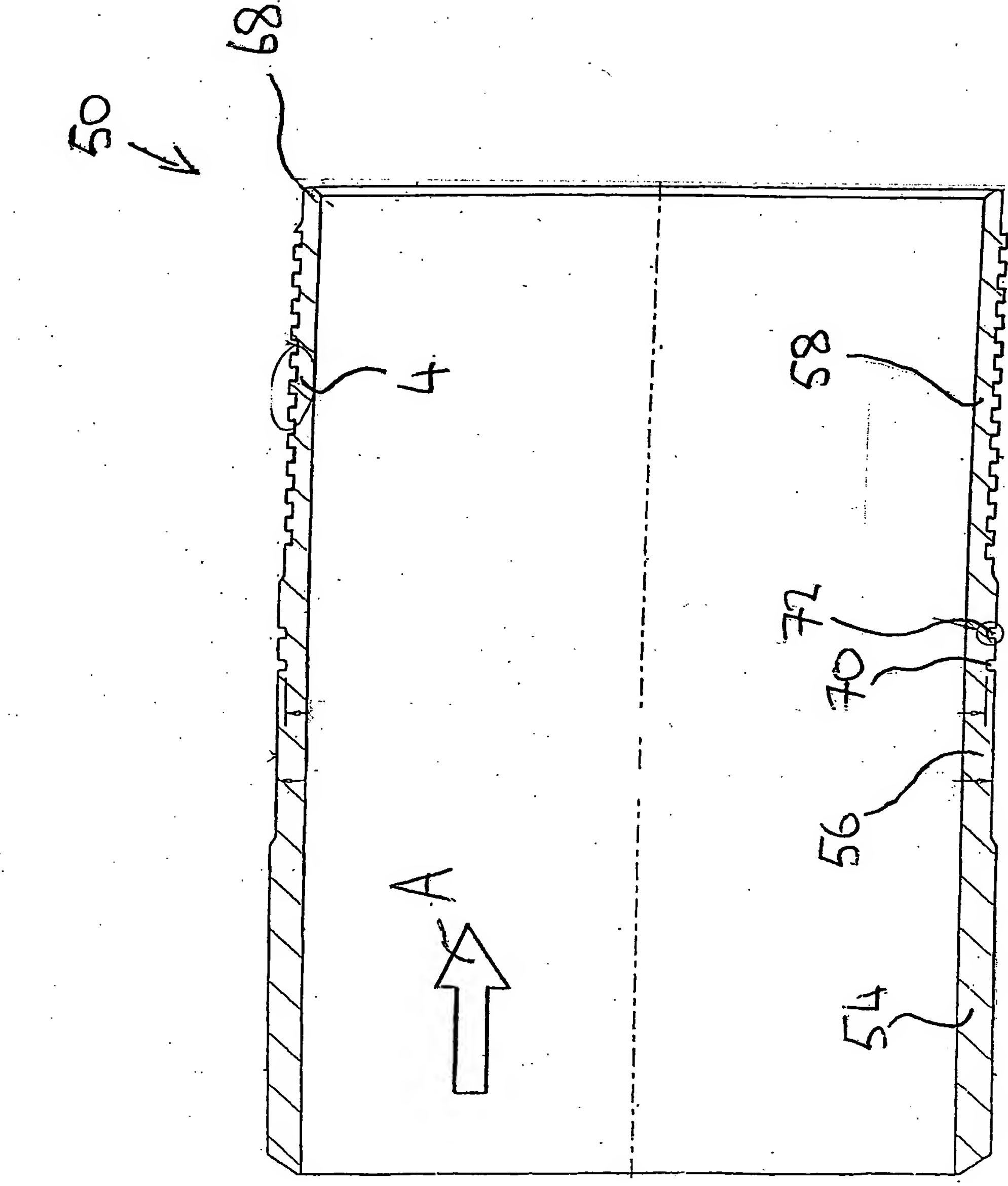


FIGURE 4

2/4

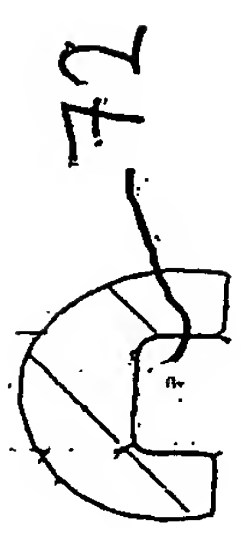


FIGURE 5

FIGURE 3

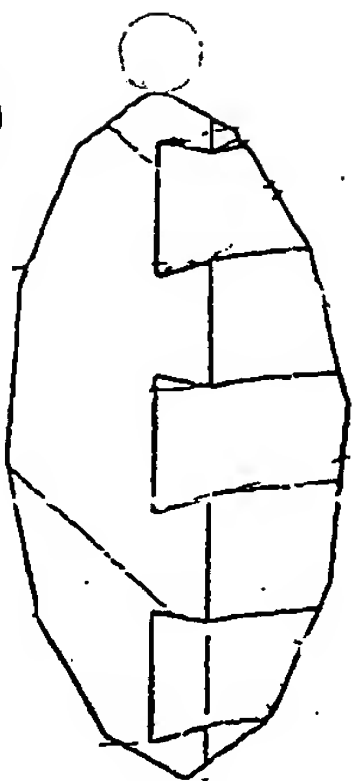


FIGURE 7

3/4

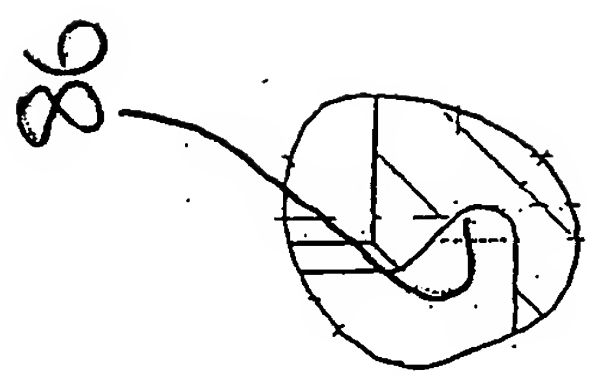
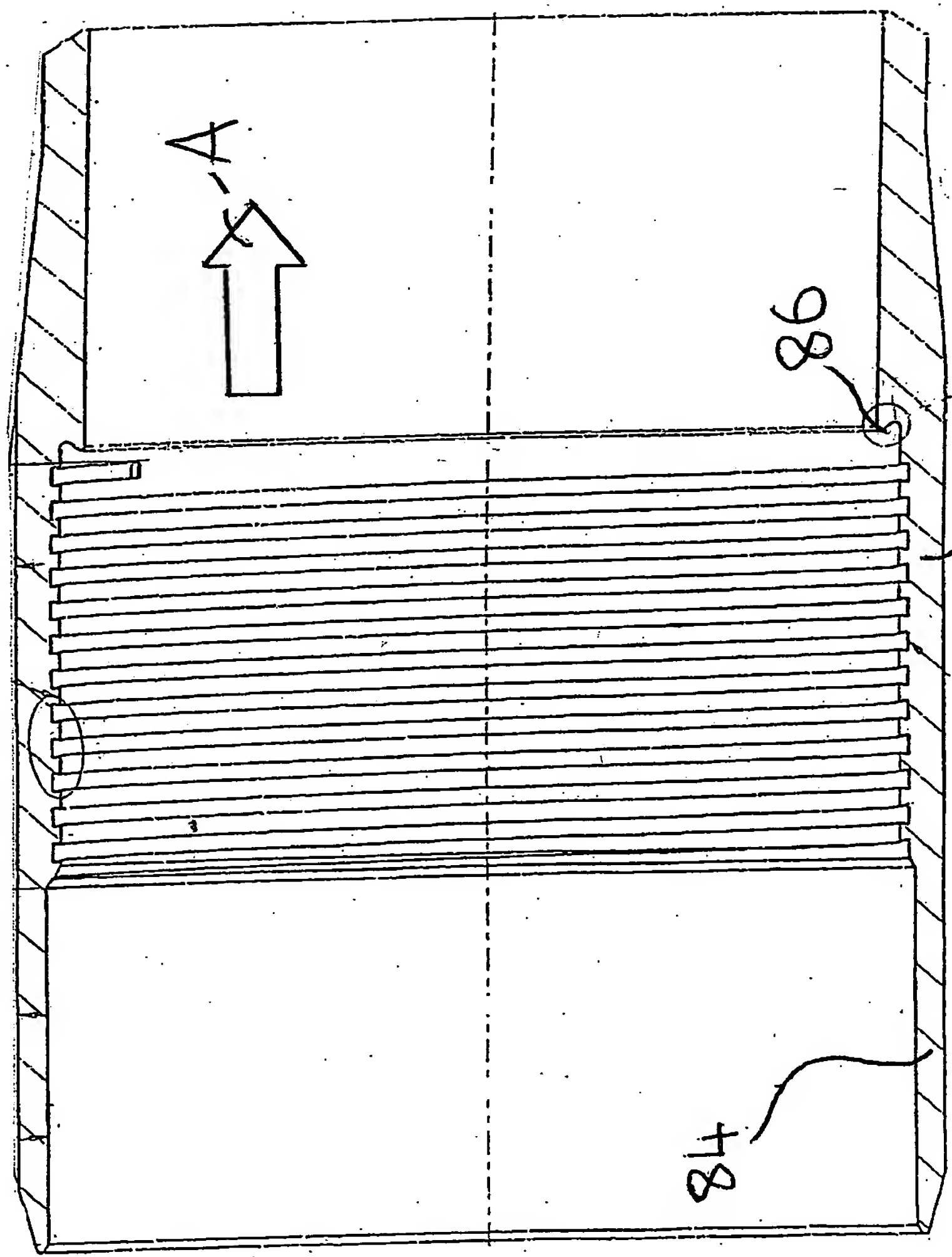


FIGURE 8



84

86

82

FIGURE 6

80

52

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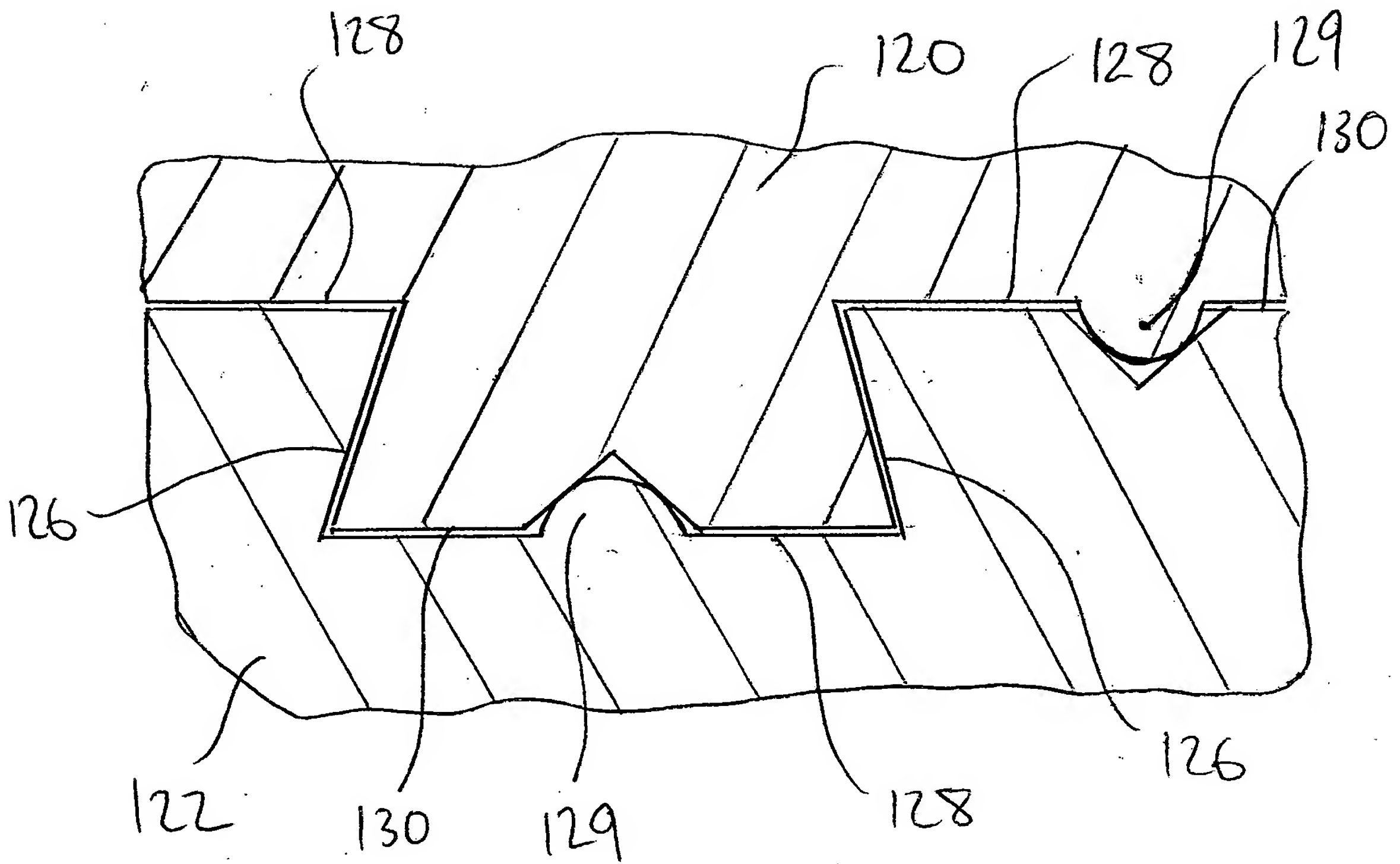


Figure 9

